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r/AcademicQuran • 5 days ago
Khaled_Balkin
Tuesday, February 4, 2025 at 12:33:52 AM GMT+1

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The variant readings mentioned in the sources as causing Hudhayfa's concern are relatively few. One often cited example is the reading of Q 2:196 "وأتموا الحج والعمرة للناس"(And complete the Hajj and 'Umrah **for Allah**) versus "وأتموا الحج والعمرة للبيت"(And complete the Hajj and 'Umrah **for the House**, i.e. the kaaba). However, such a difference does not necessarily seem more divisive than other variations found in *farsh* (diacritical marks), which still persist in the canonical readings.

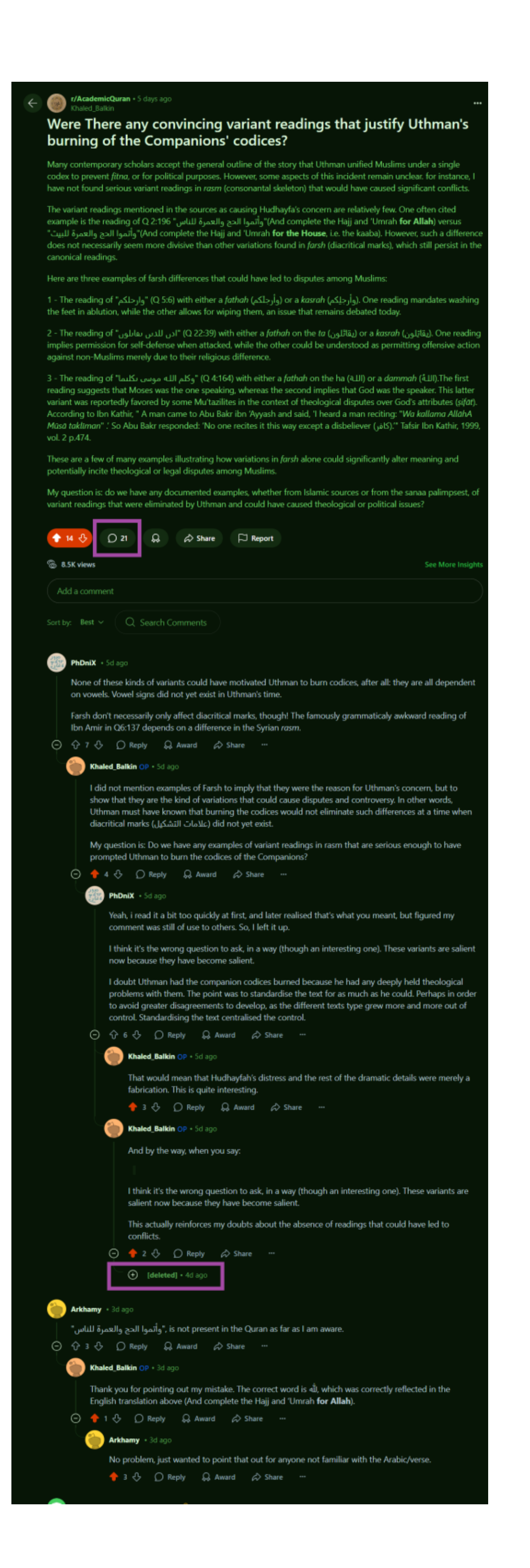
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7 | Reply | Award | Share | ···

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6 | Reply | Award | Share | ···

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2 | Reply | Share | ···

[deleted] • 4d ago

Arkhamy • 3d ago

"وأتموا الحج والعمرة للناس", is not present in the Quran as far as I am aware.

3 | Reply | Award | Share | ···

Khaled_Balkin OP • 3d ago

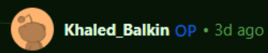
Thank you for pointing out my mistake. The correct word is لله, which was correctly reflected in the English translation above (And complete the Hajj and 'Umrah **for Allah**).

1 | Reply | Award | Share | ···

Arkhamy • 3d ago

No problem, just wanted to point that out for anyone not familiar with the Arabic/verse.

3 | Reply | Award | Share | ···



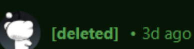
As I said, the issue is the lack of strong reasons for burning the masahif. We don't have examples of variant readings in the rasm that carry serious doctrinal or political consequences. Uthman's decision to burn the masahif seems very strange in such a case. If Muslims had disputed over minor differences in readings, such as (لله) versus (للبيت), why would Uthman take a risk that would further complicate his already precarious political situation and increase resentment against him?

The political explanations I have seen so far contradict the political reality itself, as Uthman had already lost legitimacy and was deeply embroiled in crises. So what does he do? He destroys the readings of the Iraqis, who believed their readings were **the true and legitimate REVELATION**, and those of the Syrians, who likewise considered their readings to be **the true and legitimate REVELATION**, then he imposes Zayd's reading as the standard.

If they had declared each other disbelievers due to their fanaticism toward their respective readings (regardless of how significant the differences were), he certainly knew that **they would declare him a disbeliever as well**. This seems like a very strange course of action. So, I am not completely rejecting the political interpretation, but I find it exaggerated.

Raising such issues and contradictions in the traditional narrative is not a mere intellectual exercise, but rather a means to contribute to a deeper understanding of the history of the Quran.





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u/MohammedAlFiras avatar
MohammedAlFiras
·
1d ago
I think you’re drawing the wrong conclusions here. The variant readings don’t need to have political/theological significance for there to be conflicts. It could simply be because people from a particular region are accustomed to reciting one way -> so when they hear people from other regions reciting differently, they assume that the other person is wrong. The traditional sources note this as well:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي عُثْمَانَ وَلَا تَقُولُوا لَهُ إِلَّا خَيْرًا [أَوْ قُولُوا لَهُ خَيْرًا] فِي الْمَصَاحِفِ وَإِحْرَاقِ الْمَصَاحِفِ، فَوَاللَّهِ مَا فَعَلَ الَّذِي فَعَلَ فِي الْمَصَاحِفِ إِلَّا عَنْ مَلَأٍ مِنَّا جَمِيعًا، فَقَالَ: مَا تَقُولُونَ فِي هَذِهِ الْقِرَاءَةِ؟ فَقَدْ بَلَغَنِي أَنَّ بَعْضَهُمْ يَقُولُ: إِنَّ قِرَاءَتِي خَيْرٌ مِنْ قِرَاءَتِكَ، وَهَذَا يَكَادُ أَنْ يَكُونَ كُفْرًا، قُلْنَا: فَمَا تَرَى؟ قَالَ: نَرَى أَنْ نَجْمَعَ النَّاسَ عَلَى مُصْحَفٍ وَاحِدٍ، فَلَا تَكُونُ فُرْقَةٌ، وَلَا يَكُونُ اخْتِلَافٌ،

Ali reportedly said: ”O people do not exaggerate with regards to Uthman and do not say regarding him except good regarding the codices and the burning of them. By God, he did not do that which he did except through all of our support. He [Uthman] said: What do you say with regards to this reading? It has reached me that some of them say: ”My reading is better than your reading.” And this is close to being disbelief. We said: What do you see [that should be done]? He said: We wish to unite the people upon one codex so there will neither be division nor difference.”

u/Khaled_Balkin avatar
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1d ago
The text above does not express any objection or doubt about the occurrence of disputes. Rather, it requests examples of readings that could have led people to accuse each other of disbelief.

u/MohammedAlFiras avatar
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1d ago

Yes, and I responded by stating that it's still possible for disputes to occur even if most of the reported variants don't appear to have any theological/legal/political significance. So I don't agree with your suggestion in your other comment that the details of Hudhayfah's distress are merely a fabrication (and I don't think Marijn is implying so either).

Of course there are a few variants that have legal/theological significance that diverge from the Uthmanic rasm (see here and here for example). I personally find it quite doubtful that these variations existed during the generation of the Companions. I don't think the Sana'a Palimpsest contains (m)any examples of variants of legal/theological significance either.

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because people from a particular region are accustomed to reciting one way -> so when they hear people from other regions reciting differently, they assume that the other person is wrong.

Could you provide me with an example of this type of variant reading between regions so that I can better understand your point?

u/MohammedAlFiras avatar
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My point was that disputes could occur regardless of the "type" or "significance" of the variant readings. If an imam today were to recite: "arshidna l-sirat al-mustaqim" instead of "ihdina l-sirat al-mustaqim", he's going to cause controversy even though it means the same thing. Unless we assume that most people were completely fine with reciting according to meaning, such disputes could easily have occurred during Uthman's time as well.

That being said, it isn't really clear if the well-known hadith of Uthman's collection describes disputes (i.e. arguments) amongst the early Muslims. All it says is that

Hudhayfah was troubled by their differences in recitation - not that they themselves were currently disputing with each other over recitation:

فَأَفْزَعَ حُذَيْفَةَ اخْتِلاَفُهُمْ فِي الْقِرَاءَةِ فَقَالَ حُذَيْفَةُ لِعُثْمَانَ يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَدْرِكْ هَذِهِ الأُمَّةَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَخْتَلِفُوا فِي الْكِتَابِ اخْتِلاَفَ الْيَهُودِ وَالنَّصَارَى

"Their differences in recitation alarmed Hudhayfah. So Hudhayfah said to Uthman: O Commander of the Believers, save this ummah before they disagree regarding the scripture [similar to] the disagreements of the Jews and Christians"

I see no reason to think this detail is an embellishment/forgery as you suggested. In fact, this sounds quite close to what u/PhDnix said: "Perhaps in order to avoid greater disagreements to develop, as the different texts type grew more and more out of control. "

u/Khaled_Balkin avatar
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19h ago
Ok. We all now agree that there were no significant variant readings in the rasm that could lead to theological or political disputes. However, several issues remain unresolved.

You also adopt the idea that the number of readings increased over time, which suggests that oral transmission played a primary role during that period. However, we know that the Quran was being transmitted in written form at the time—otherwise, what was Uthman burning?

According to tradition, variant readings existed since Muhammad's time, not that they "increased." The claim that they multiplied over time lacks support from early sources or manuscripts. It remains mere speculation.

The episode occurred between Iraqis and Syrians. The Iraqis received their reading from Ibn Mas'ud, who had been directly involved in disputes over Quranic readings during Muhammad's lifetime, while the Syrians were taught by Abud-darda', who was well aware of the concept of the seven ahruf. How could it be that neither of these major figures informed their students about this, leading to a situation where Iraqis and Syrians were suddenly "surprised" and "shocked" by different readings, to the point of accusing each other of disbelief, and Hudhayfah being so alarmed (فزع)?

If we accept that the variant readings had no theological or political implications, why would Uthman risk creating another controversy when he was already politically vulnerable and facing accusations of financial and political corruption?

All of this seems unlikely.

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12h ago
I don't really know what you mean by "the number of readings increased over time". I think Hudhayfah's concern (as mentioned in the hadith above) is that the Muslims are already differing over the recitation of the Quran. So (according to him) there is a risk that future generations will differ even more. Whether this is actually a reasonable concern is a different question from whether Hudhayfah (and thus Uthman) thought it would happen.

Regarding (3), I don't think it's unreasonable to suggest that even if Ibn Mas'ud was aware of the seven ahruf hadith, the same could not be said for all of his students. Even if they were aware of the hadith, it would have been difficult for them to determine if a certain variant reading was really legitimised by the seven ahruf hadith. In other words, how could the Iraqis really know that the Syrians' variants falls under the seven ahruf? Even if we assume that the seven ahruf allows for recitation according to meaning (i.e. variation that does not come directly from the Prophet), students of Ibn Mas'ud (for example) could still have considered their reading to be superior to other readings because they considered it to be a more faithful representation of the Prophet's original reading. As I mentioned in my previous comment, it also doesn't seem to be the case that the Syrians/Iraqis were surprised at the existence of variant readings - it is merely Hudhayfah who was shocked at the lack of unity amongst the Muslims.

Regarding (4), I don't see where you're going with this. As long as you accept the Uthmanic standardisation and narratives of his destruction of codices - which does seem to be accepted by contemporary scholars (see for example, Nicolai Sinai's article "When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure?) - it's clear that he was creating another controversy. Perhaps Uthman was naïve enough to think that the Muslims would appreciate the greater benefit of his project. Or he thought that the issue was so urgent that it doesn't matter if it causes controversy. Either way, I don't really see how this is relevant.

u/Khaled_Balkin avatar
Khaled_Balkin
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·
5h ago

"(according to him) there is a risk that future generations will differ even more."

I don't think this is what Hudhayfah meant. His statement "so that they do not differ as the Jews and Christians did حتى لا يختلفوا اختلاف اليهود والنصارى" does not necessarily imply that differences would intensify in the future, unless we assume that the Quran was recited based on meaning. However, this idea is not well-established due to inconsistencies in the hadiths regarding the seven ahruf: one hadith attributed to the Prophet states, "The important thing is that a word of punishment is not changed into a word of mercy." "المهم أن لا تغير كلمة عذاب بكلمة رحمة" From this, we might infer that the permission (رخصة) was for reciting based on meaning, which is the view held by some scholars, such as Francois Deroche. On the other hand, another hadith depicts the Prophet saying, "This is how it was revealed" (هكذا أنزلت) during the dispute between Umar and Hisham ibn Hakim.

Moreover, reports indicate that this issue was not treated with strict rigidity. For example, Ibn Mas'ud used to tell his students: "If you differ over a تـ or a يـ, then make it a يـ and keep looking at (studying) the mushaf." (إن اختلفتم في تاء أو ياء فاجعلوها ياء وأديموا النظر في المصحف) This suggests that teaching during that period relied on mushafs, and that they were not overly strict regarding minor differences.

Therefore, the claim that Hudhayfah feared the variant readings would escalate in the future is an interpretation based on a specific assumption. Do you believe that the Quran was recited based on meaning, or not?

2.

"Even if they were aware of the hadith, it would have been difficult for them to determine if a certain variant reading was really legitimized by the seven ahruf hadith."

The Syrians would testify that they received their recitation from their teacher Abd-darda' or perhaps al-Miqdad, while the Iraqis would likewise testify that they took theirs from Ibn Mas'ud. Suppose that the Syrians had learned the reading " وأتموا الحج والعمرة لله" from Abd-darda', while the Iraqis had learned "للبيت" from Ibn Mas'ud. If we assume your second possibility, that one of the disputing groups did not believe that the other reading fell under the category of seven ahruf ,then that would mean they believed that the companions themselves were reciting based on meaning, or even altering meanings. But if they believed that Muhammad's own companions were altering words of the Quran without having received them directly from him as revelation, would some of these soldiers be more royalist than the king?

Moreover, Hudhayfah did not use his authority as a commander and senior companion to inform the disputing soldiers about the divine permission (الرخصة الإلهية). Nor did he tell them that all these readings were part of the revelation. Had he done so, the problem would have been resolved. Instead, he resorted to a weird solution: sug-

gesting the burning of the codices of Ibn Mas'ud, Ubay, and all the mushafs throughout the entire empire. (This would have been logistically near-impossible at that time, but that's another issue.)

u/MohammedAlFiras avatar
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3h ago
I'm not really sure what you're trying to argue for here. Are you trying to argue that Uthman didn't order the destruction of codices belonging to the Companions? Or are you merely trying to argue that Uthman may have had a different goal in standardizing the Quranic text? Or both? Your replies are obviously trying to "poke holes" in the conventional narrative regarding Uthman's canonisation, but you also seem to accept the basic outline of it (that the text we have today was canonised by Uthman; and that pre-Uthmanic codices may not have differed significantly from the Uthmanic codex). So I'm not really seeing the point of this conversation.

u/Khaled_Balkin avatar
Khaled_Balkin
OP
·
5h ago
3.

"Perhaps Uthman was naïve enough to think that the Muslims would appreciate the greater benefit of his project."

This issue is not about Uthman's naivety or lack thereof. The historical accounts mention clear opposition from Ibn Mas'ud and Abud-darda'. Even Abu Musa, when he was sent a copy of the Uthmanic mushaf (written according to Zayd's recitation), told his students: "Whatever additions you find in this mushaf that are not in mine, do not remove them. And whatever you find missing, write it in." (ما وجدتم في مصحفي هذا من زيادة فلا تنقصوها، وما وجدتهم فيه من نقصان فاكتبوه فيه). This means that Abu Musa practically refused to abandon his own recitations. So, Uthman was well aware of the significant opposition from some of the most prominent companions, yet he still proceeded with this controversial decision. The issue here is not about being naïve.

4.

”Or he thought that the issue was so urgent that it doesn’t matter if it causes controversy. Either way, I don’t really see how this is relevant.”

This does not fit with the claim that the recitations were ”perhaps based on meaning and did not carry serious theological or political differences.” Why would burning the mushafs be an urgent and necessary matter, even if it caused him further political troubles, when the differences were supposedly minor, such as ”أرشدنا” vs. ”اهدنا”? The meanings are close, and according to the hadith I mentioned earlier, this was permissible under the permission of the seven ahruf. What truly mattered was that a word expressing mercy was not substituted with one expressing punishment. Such variations, including replacing ”الله” with ”للبيت,” are not radical shifts in meaning.

MohammedAlFiras

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3h ago

I’m not really sure what you’re trying to argue for here. Are you trying to argue that Uthman didn’t order the destruction of codices belonging to the Companions? Or are you merely trying to argue that Uthman may have had a different goal in standardizing the Quranic text? Or both? Your replies are obviously trying to ”poke holes” in the conventional narrative regarding Uthman’s canonisation, but you also seem to accept the basic outline of it (that the text we have today was canonised by Uthman; and that pre-Uthmanic codices may not have differed significantly from the Uthmanic codex). So I’m not really seeing the point of this conversation.

u/Khaled_Balkin avatar

Khaled_Balkin

OP

·

2h ago

Just asking questions (Regardless of my goal). I see many issues in the history of the Quran and the various interpretations among traditionalists and academics, especially the dominant political interpretation.

u/MohammedAlFiras avatar

MohammedAlFiras

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55m ago

Alright, that's fine. But it would be better if you could suggest your preferred alternative interpretations and their implications. If Uthman's motive wasn't to unite the Muslims upon a single standard codex, what was it? And does that new motive have any implications for the history of the Quran itself? You might disagree but I think the conventional interpretation is fairly convincing. Even if Uthman personally had a different motive, I don't see that as having any real impact on the history of the Qur'an (and the topic is thus un-interesting to me).

I disagree with a lot of the claims you made in your earlier comment, but I don't have the time to write a more detailed response. I'll respond to the first point. You say that my interpretation of Hudhayfah's statement "so that they do not differ as the Jews and Christians did" assumes that the Quran was transmitted according to meaning. I don't think that is necessary. He could simply be saying something like: "The Prophet died less than 2 decades ago and already the Muslims are not united in how they recite the Quran! If we don't do something about it now, the Muslims would fall into even more significant disagreements like the Christians and the Jews did". That he's concerned about future disagreements is also suggested by his statement: "Save this ummah before they differ like the Christians and Jews did". This does not really require that "the number of readings increased over time" as you said in your earlier reply.

u/Khaled_Balkin avatar
Khaled_Balkin
OP
·
15m ago
As I said, the issue is the lack of strong reasons for burning the masahif. We don't have examples of variant readings in the rasm that carry serious doctrinal or political consequences. Uthman's decision to burn the masahif seems very strange in such a case. If Muslims had disputed over minor differences in readings, such as (لله) versus (للبيت), why would Uthman take a risk that would further complicate his already precarious political situation and increase resentment against him?

The political explanations I have seen so far contradict the political reality itself, as Uthman had already lost legitimacy and was deeply embroiled in crises. So what does he do? He destroys the readings of the Iraqis, who believed their readings were the true and legitimate REVELATION, and those of the Syrians, who likewise considered their readings to be the true and legitimate REVELATION, then he imposes Zayd's reading as the standard.

If they had declared each other disbelievers due to their fanaticism toward their respective readings (regardless of how significant the differences were), he certainly knew that they would declare him a disbeliever as well. This seems like a very strange course of action. So, I am not completely rejecting the political interpretation, but I find it exaggerated.

Raising such issues and contradictions in the traditional narrative is not a mere intellectual exercise, but rather a means to contribute to a deeper understanding of the history of the Quran.